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PROBABLE INTELLIGENCE WARNING OF SOVIET ATTACK ON THE US

Submitted by the

DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate: The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, The Joint Staff, the Atomic Energy Commission, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Concurred in by the

INTELLIGENCE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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PROBABLE INTELLIGENCE WARNING OF SOVIET ATTACK ON THE US THROUGH MID-1960*

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the warning which could be provided by intelligence in the case of a Soviet initiation of hostilities against the US between the present and mid-1960.[1]

SCOPE

The warning of Soviet attack discussed in this paper is that which intelligence might be able to give prior to the actual launching of an attack. Warning which might be obtained from US or allied early warning radar or other tactical detection devices is not discussed. Nor do we discuss the possibility of obtaining chance warning from sources whose primary mission is not early warning, e.g., weather stations, naval and commercial vessels at sea. The possibility that the USSR might resort to an ultimatum and thus itself warn of attack in the event of a rejection is also excluded from consideration.

CONCLUSIONS

1. In the absence of a high level penetration of the Soviet government, the warning of attack given by intelligence must be the end product of a process of reasoning from incomplete evidence, and it therefore represents a *judgment of probability*. Under the most favorable circumstances, intelligence might be able to state that the degree of probability of attack was very high; in other cases the judgment might be only that the chances of a Soviet attack were somewhat better

* The Intelligence Advisory Committee has undertaken a survey of sources of warning information to determine how fully and promptly present and potential collection methods, sources, and transmission channels can provide information essential to advance warning of Sino-Soviet Bloc hostile action. A revised estimate will be prepared if the findings of the survey warrant changes in judgments made in the present estimate.

[1] The date mid-1960 does not relate to any estimated capability or intention of the USSR to attack the US at that time. It is chosen to make this paper parallel studies of Soviet capabilities which are similarly projected about three years ahead.

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than even; in many situations intelligence might be able to do no better than to say that the USSR possibly intended to attack. The warning actually given will depend upon the particular context of events, upon unique features of such situations including even elements of pure chance, and upon certain variables which cannot be fully anticipated or compensated for by prepared procedures. (*Paras. 5–6, 11, 15*)

2. Preliminary and successive warnings may be given by intelligence which could have a cumulative effect. Even if these did not permit a firm conclusion that the USSR intended to attack, they might still provide a basis for critically important political, military, or intelligence decisions. In the crisis situation likely to precede an attack, the ability of intelligence to give more reliable warning might depend largely on exceptional collection measures requiring prior policy decisions. These measures would provide information, possibly of great value, on Soviet capabilities and readiness, and inferentially perhaps on Soviet intentions to attack. (*Paras. 13, 25*)

3. The constant factor in intelligence judgments affecting warning is our measure of Soviet capabilities, specifically, the level of military readiness prevailing at the time. We have examined what indications of military preparations intelligence might obtain which would provide a basis for giving warning of attack. The kind of warning given would also depend on the apparent pace of Soviet attack preparations and the correlation of military and nonmilitary indications. (*Paras. 7, 44*) Assuming the USSR were to attack *now,* we conclude that:

a. As a rough estimate, a force up to 300 long-range aircraft could probably be launched concurrently without producing indications permitting intelligence to give warning of possible attack. Generally speaking, the probability of obtaining warning indications would increase as the numbers of aircraft increased. There is no basis for judging at what point the chances of receiving warning indications would be about even; we believe, however, that if the number of aircraft launched concurrently were as great as about 800, the chances of their producing warning indications would be considerably greater than even. If received, these indications would probably permit intelligence to warn of a possible attack some 4–8 hours before attacking aircraft could reach radar warning lines. It would always be possible, however, for the movement to and out of forward bases to be a practice maneuver rather than an attack. (*Paras. 31–32*)

b. Warning of the employment of surface-to-surface guided missiles up to ranges of 700 nautical miles, including those launched from submarines, is improbable. (*Paras. 29, 34–35*)

c. Warning of possible attack on Western Europe by Soviet forces stationed in East Germany would vary seasonally, depending on whether units were at home stations or at some field-training phase of the annual training cycle. Warning based on movements of units to attack positions would probably vary as follows:

(1) From a few hours to a few days in April and in September–October; but possibly none.

(2) From two to five days in May–August.

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(3) From five to seven days in November–March. (*Para. 36*)

d. If a Soviet attack was preceded by full mobilization, warning of possible attack could probably be given a few weeks in advance. We might during the course of mobilization be able to forecast the approximate date at which military preparations would be complete, but it would always be possible for the USSR to attack with its ready forces at an earlier date. (*Paras. 37–39*)

e. Warning of attack by clandestine means would depend primarily on the possibility that some part of the Soviet clandestine plan had miscarried or on chance discovery. Thus there could be no assurance that intelligence would be able to warn of such forms of attack. (*Paras. 40–41*)

4. The general effect of the development of Soviet capabilities estimated as likely to be developed by 1960 will be to reduce the chances of obtaining significant warning indications. The key factors will be the degree of modernization achieved by Soviet armed forces and the state of readiness which they normally maintain. If higher levels of general readiness and activity are maintained, there would be fewer indications derived from preparations prior to attack. To the extent that ballistic missiles of intermediate or intercontinental range may be available to the USSR by 1960, the warning problem would be further complicated, since intelligence is unlikely to be able to give advance warning of the use of such weapons. (*Paras. 47–52*)

DISCUSSION

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

5. Warning given by intelligence must be based on the collection and evaluation of information about Soviet preparations for attack and about Soviet behavior prior to attack. Given the considerable effort by the USSR to limit the collection of information concerning its plans and activities, such information would probably always be incomplete, and concerning some Soviet activities would be either fragmentary or unobtainable. Nevertheless, the varied collection methods available to intelligence would almost certainly yield some evidence, probably discrete items of information, pointing to increasing military readiness. These latter would not necessarily, in and of themselves, establish a Soviet intention to attack, inasmuch as they might also be consistent with an intention to threaten, to deter, or to be ready to defend and retaliate. Only penetration of the Soviet government or military command at a high level would be likely to produce full and reliable information on Soviet military plans and intentions. It is unlikely that such information would be available.

6. Thus, intelligence must reason from many kinds of indirect evidence in order to reach conclusions about the USSR's actual and intended courses of action. In these circumstances, warning is the end product of a process of reasoning from incomplete evidence, and it therefore represents a *judgment of probability*. Such a judgment would rest in the first instance upon a weighing of indications of Soviet activities to establish whether they pointed to one or another course of action. The warning judgment would also proceed in part from the then prevailing estimate of general Soviet capabilities and intentions. The latter would provide a guide to the alternative courses of action which might be entertained by the Soviet leaders. The ability to give reliable warning would therefore depend upon the

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completeness and accuracy of this estimative background, as well as upon correct interpretation of the available specific indications which might reflect a Soviet decision to adopt one specific course of action from among the available alternatives. If the current indications were inconclusive, warning would of necessity have to rest more heavily upon a general appraisal of Soviet intentions and probable courses of action.

7. The constant factor in judgments affecting warning is our measure of Soviet capabilities, specifically, the level of military readiness prevailing at the time. It is in this area of physical preparations that intelligence is best able to gather significant evidence. The likelihood of attack could normally be judged as minimal so long as the Soviet military establishment was judged not to have attained a reasonable stage of general readiness for attack. After this stage had been reached, further warning would almost certainly have to come from military indications of last-minute pre-attack preparations and from nonmilitary indications pointing to an increasing likelihood of attack. Indications of last-minute military preparations would be highly significant in arriving at a judgment of probable Soviet intent to attack. However, a basic difficulty in judging Soviet intentions under these circumstances would be in reaching a conclusion that these Soviet activities reflected exclusively an intent to attack (i.e., did not reflect an intent to deter, or to be ready to retaliate if attacked). An additional difficulty would be that many of these final preparations would be made so close to the launching of the attack that there would be only the shortest time to obtain the information, to assess it, and to communicate warning within the US government.

8. In reaching a conclusion with respect to their significance, indications of Soviet last-minute military preparations would not be considered in isolation, since these preparations would always occur in a context of Soviet political and economic activities. Some indication of these latter activities would almost certainly be detected, so that intelligence would be able to judge the significance of military preparations in light of a more comprehensive picture of Soviet behavior at the time. In general, the more indications of Soviet military and nonmilitary preparations intelligence has, the more certain it could be of forecasting the probable course of action which they portend.

9. It is evident from this summary statement of the manner in which warning judgments would be made that the warning given would be neither complete nor unequivocal. Nevertheless, there are various preliminary kinds of warning which could be given with a high degree of certainty and reliability. For example, intelligence could probably give reliable warning of potential danger in situations, resulting either from Soviet actions or reactions to Western actions, which could lead to a Soviet decision to attack. Intelligence could probably warn of military and other preparations which raised Soviet capabilities to a stage of readiness at which attack became an increasingly feasible course of action. It might warn of a technological breakthrough which similarly increased Soviet capabilities for attack.

10. Valuable as such warnings would be, the critical task of warning would always be to provide a timely judgment regarding Soviet intention to attack. In this area, it is considerably more difficult to achieve a high degree of certainty. The judgment concerning the likelihood of Soviet intention to attack might be expressed as a warning of *possible* intent to attack, *probable* intent to attack, or *clear* intent to attack; the uncertainty involved could therefore range continuously from the minimal case of judging that a Soviet attack was only a possibility to the extreme case of being virtually certain that an attack would be launched.

11. We believe that intelligence would almost certainly not be able to give warning of clear intent to attack because the USSR's preparations could also be interpreted as indicating an intention to threaten, to deter, or to defend itself. The most that could reasonably be expected of intelligence would be a judgment that attack was the probable Soviet course of action. Under the most favorable circumstances, intelligence might be able to state

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that the degree of probability was very high; in other cases, the judgment might be only that the chances of a Soviet attack were somewhat better than even. In many situations, intelligence might be able to do no better than to say that the USSR possibly intended to attack.

12. Within the categories of probable and possible intent to attack, the warning judgment could also vary in regard to the particulars of the attack itself. Some indication of the form, scale, or time of a possible attack might be ascertained from the character and pace of Soviet preparations, even though Soviet intentions were so unclear as to preclude a judgment that an attack was probable. However, just as Soviet behavior and preparatory activities would rarely, if ever, permit intelligence to give warning of clear intent to attack, so too the time, scale, or form of the attack would invariably be uncertain in some respect.

13. This is not to say that warning cannot perform a useful function unless it can predict attack with complete certainty. Warnings of lesser degrees of certainty may be given in such a way that they have a cumulative effect. Such successive warnings, even if they did not permit a firm conclusion that the USSR intended to attack, might still provide a basis for critically important political, military, or intelligence decisions. They might be adequate, for example, to justify undertaking diplomatic moves to cope with a developing crisis, placing US military forces at one or another stage of alert, or invoking special intelligence collection measures in order to provide a basis for firmer and more complete warning.

14. The process of warning is complete only when warnings given by intelligence are acted upon by decision-making elements of government. Intelligence must be able to earn credibility for its warning judgments among officials who are not regularly involved with intelligence. It must therefore be concerned to make as complete as possible a showing of evidence for any warning given. A warning which did not carry conviction to responsible policy officials could be as much an intelligence failure as no warning at all.

15. It is evident from the foregoing that warning will depend upon the particular context of events, upon unique features of such situations including even elements of pure chance, and upon certain variables which cannot be fully anticipated or compensated for by prepared procedures. Some of the variable factors which affect the warning problem are discussed in the following section.

VARIABLE FACTORS AFFECTING THE PROBLEM OF WARNING

Circumstances in which the Soviet Decision to Attack is Made

16. An important variable factor affecting the warning problem is the kind of situation which may lead to the Soviet decision to attack. Several alternatives are conceivable. One would be that a Soviet decision to attack was made well in advance of the actual launching of the attack, and in the absence of any crisis offering an immediate challenge to vital Soviet interests. Such a decision might be made if the Soviet leaders believed that they had acquired so decisive a margin of military superiority that they could anticipate defeating the US without the USSR itself receiving unacceptable damage. A major breakthrough to some offensive or defensive capability which could not be countered by the US would permit the USSR such a choice.[2] If intelligence were to get evidence that a breakthrough had been made, this fact itself would alert intelligence and possibly serve as the basis for giving general warning. Our ability to get evidence of a breakthrough depends primarily on the kind of breakthrough achieved. If some knowledge of the fact of a breakthrough was obtained, our ability to give more specific warning would depend on the preparations and the time necessary to exploit the breakthrough operationally, and

[2] We have estimated the Soviet capacity for future scientific advances and the likelihood of a breakthrough within the period of this estimate in Paras. 65–68 of NIE 11–6–56, "Capabilities and Trends of Soviet Science and Technology" (9 October 1956).

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the effect that its exploitation would have on other preparations which would be necessary for attack.

17. The Soviet leaders might also decide for war if they believed that the US was planning an eventual attack on the USSR and that their best chance of surviving lay in attacking first.[3] In this case, as in the case of a technological breakthrough, a decision to attack, if made well in advance of the attack, would enable the USSR to take a long period to prepare. This would provide the intelligence community with time to collect a broader range of indications and these might progressively assume a meaningful pattern. Initially at least, such preparations would probably not have an emergency character and would probably be regarded as a normal development of military capabilities. At some point in the course of this period of preparation, however, certain actions might be taken clearly at variance with the pace of a normal development of capabilities or the character of the world situation. Toward the end of this period, actions of a last-minute character might be observed which, together with earlier warnings, would increase our ability to give warning. Thus, while an atmosphere of rising tension characteristic of a crisis situation might not be present until a late stage, intelligence might be alerted at an earlier point during the period of preparation.

18. The USSR might also reach a decision to attack the US in response to developments in some local crisis which neither party originally intended to lead to general war. The USSR might decide to attack because it believed that an actual or threatened intervention in its sphere of vital interest could not be countered by limited means. Or it might conclude that the USSR had become engaged beyond retreat in some area where the Western Powers would be prepared to risk general war. In either case, the Soviet leaders might decide that general war was preferable to submitting to a serious reversal and that it would be to their military advantage to attack first. In this situation the decision to attack would in all probability be accompanied by some degree of political tension, perhaps a very high degree, which would in itself give rise to preliminary warning. However, the time period over which a local crisis reached an acute stage could vary considerably, and this would affect the ability of intelligence to assemble a meaningful pattern of indications. If the crisis developed over a brief period of time, and if Soviet military readiness was already advanced or if the Soviet leaders decided to attack with only minimum preparations, the indications obtained might be few. If, on the other hand, the USSR took a certain amount of time to prepare and position its forces, further and more specific warning might be obtained from the pace and nature of the last-minute preparations. In the latter case, a higher degree of probability could be attached to the warning of attack. Nevertheless, in each case, the nature of the warning given would depend also upon a judgment as to (a) whether the USSR considered that the concrete situation presented an unacceptable challenge to Soviet interests, and (b) whether the Soviet government would take any alternative course of action short of war which was open to it and which could preserve its interests.

19. It is also possible that in a local crisis the USSR would decide to engage US or Western forces locally while hoping to avoid general war. This course of action would rest on a calculation that Soviet objectives could be achieved by a limited application of force and that the US would be deterred from initiating an attack on the USSR itself. There would clearly be great danger that such a situation would develop into general war. The Soviet leaders would have to recognize that the US might conclude that expansion of hostilities was inevitable and therefore itself seize the advantage of launching the first attack in a general war. Faced with this possibility, the Soviet leaders might at some point decide to launch such an attack themselves. This situation might be in some respects the most

[3] Our views of the Soviet estimate of the world situation and probable Soviet courses of action relevant to this point are set forth in NIE 11-4-56, "Soviet Capabilities and Probable Courses of Action Through 1961" (2 August 1956). See especially Paras. 89-94 and 148-171.

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difficult of all for warning purposes. Once its forces were involved in a local action, the USSR could decide at any phase to make the hostilities general. Tensions would be very high, and while this might assist intelligence in some ways, it would also make the interpretation of indications extremely difficult. In the given circumstances, Soviet forces would presumably be close to full readiness and maximum security precautions would be in effect. A certain degree of intelligence and military alert in the US would also obtain, based on warnings as to the growing Soviet commitment in the local crisis. Any warning of Soviet intent to expand the local crisis into a general war would have to be inferred from evidence of Soviet last-minute preparations of a scale, character, or location at variance with those required for the local engagement in progress.

Effect of a Period of Tension

20. The degree of political tension that prevailed would also be an important variable factor. A period of rising tension would in itself constitute warning of an increasing likelihood of war. It would produce more indications, bring intelligence to a high degree of alertness, and perhaps lead it to take exceptional measures to collect information on Soviet activities. On the other hand, a period of tension also creates difficulties in the correct evaluation of information about Soviet activities and about Soviet interpretation of US activities. For example, most of the USSR's political and propaganda actions preparatory to attack on the US might not differ greatly from those which could be expected in any period of heightened tension. These could include: diplomatic approaches to certain states to persuade them to abandon their alliances with the US; explicit threats against countries furnishing bases to the US; massive "peace" propaganda directed at the populations of Western states in order to undermine their will to resist or to destroy their confidence in the motives and intentions of the governments; plausible new proposals to ban nuclear weapons; intensified propaganda directed to the Bloc populations to prepare them psychologically for "resistance to aggression." Such actions could in themselves be interpreted as defensively motivated or as part of a war of nerves, and they would thus not establish that the USSR had the intention to attack. However, taken in conjunction with other kinds of indications, they might enable intelligence to give warning with a relatively greater degree of certainty. For example, intelligence would view seriously evidence received, during a period of rising tension, that Communist parties had been instructed to stand by for the execution of sabotage and subversion missions, and this type of evidence might be in hand.

21. A period of rising tensions would also make it more difficult to interpret indications of Soviet military preparations as evidence of a specific intent to attack. The USSR might be carrying out military preparations, not on the basis of a firm decision to initiate war, but for purposes of intimidation or in order to increase its defensive readiness and its ability to retaliate against a US attack which it feared was impending. It is also possible that Soviet preparations for war might be undertaken because of a misinterpretation of US policies, by which the Soviet leaders considered that they were about to be forced to go to war, against their real desire. The importance of a correct US estimate on this point would be very great, yet it would be particularly difficult to make such an estimate during a period of rising tension.

22. Thus a large number of military indications might not justify a warning of probable attack. Intelligence could say that the likelihood of war and the USSR's readiness for attack were increasing. If such a situation was protracted and if enough indications were obtained, intelligence could probably project the trend of Soviet preparation toward a period of maximum danger.

Functioning of Intelligence under Crisis Conditions

23. Since warning is a product of judgment, there are variable human factors which must be taken into account. Alertness would vary

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depending on the manner in which the crisis developed, its intensity, and duration. There are manys ways in which the alertness and effectiveness of intelligence increases under crisis conditions. For example, field reporting and intelligence analysis become sharply focused on the crisis situation; new sources of information held in reserve for such situations are put into use; resources of the intelligence community are more closely integrated to deal with the crisis, and, intelligence is increasingly disposed to consider whether current evidence indicates hostile intent. On the other hand, in the event of a long sustained crisis involving a high degree of tension, key personnel would be subjected to fatigue and strain. If at one stage or another apparently mistaken warning judgments had been made, undue caution might come into play. [4]

24. Once a crisis situation arises, the volume of reports increases and their reliability on the whole declines, thus confronting intelligence with a large number of ambiguous reports from inadequately identified sources and of uncertain reliability. There is also an increase in the number of reports from sources of known reliability, some of which sources come into play as a result of a crisis situation. In these circumstances, communications channels may be overloaded, with resulting delays in the transmission and the receipt of information. However, it is not possible for the intelligence officer to suspend judgment until more complete and satisfactory evidence becomes available, because of the pressure of time in a developing crisis and the demands of intelligence consumers for guidance. As a consequence, the intelligence warnings given may be less reliable or more tentative.

25. Intelligence could employ emergency collection procedures under conditions of crisis in order to improve the quantity and quality of information available. Photographic and electronic reconnaissance over Soviet controlled territory could be undertaken. Agents held in reserve for such a situation and equipped with special means of communication could be activated. New locations and devices for monitoring levels of activity at Soviet air bases and other military installations might be available. Some of these exceptional measures would provide information, possibly of great value, on Soviet capabilities and readiness, and inferentially perhaps on Soviet intentions to attack. Some measures in this category, in particular air penetrations, could have the effect of increasing tensions or even of provoking Soviet attack. For intelligence to employ them would probably require policy decisions; these might or might not permit their use and would in any case cause delay.

Effect of Soviet Deception Attempts [5]

26. It seems almost certain that, whatever form the initial Soviet attack took, the Soviet leaders would wish to achieve surprise. Therefore, they would probably attempt to mislead Western intelligence as to their intention to attack, or even as to their capabilities and readiness for attack. This could be done in a variety of ways. For example, the USSR could make diplomatic moves or adjust its propaganda in order to reduce tensions. It could make plausible proposals to negotiate the issues which had given rise to the crisis. It could simulate reduction of its military preparations, or even actually reduce some of them. It could arrange for Western intelligence to obtain false information as to deficiencies in Soviet readiness and capabilities.

27. It is impossible to predict whether or not in any actual situation attempts at deception would be successful. Intelligence might still

[4] It is possible that preliminary warnings would result in US precautionary measures which would lead the USSR to cancel or postpone a planned attack. In this case, what appeared to be a mistaken warning would in fact have been a correct one. Intelligence might have accomplished its warning mission completely, yet not be able to demonstrate that it had done so.

[5] See SNIE 100–2–57, "Soviet Capabilities for Deception" (28 May 1957) for a fuller discussion of the deception problem. Paras. 66–70 deal with deception in connection with attacks on the continental US.

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be able to detect the continuation of specific military preparations. Such preparations, if detected, could be explained by Soviet caution and mistrust, but they would also point to the possibility of a deception maneuver and they might be particularly significant as evidence of a possible Soviet intention to achieve surprise in launching an attack. Even if a Soviet deception attempt was not wholly successful, however, the warning problem would be complicated. Because of contradictory indications, intelligence might not be able to give warning as promptly, firmly, or specifically as it could in the absence of a deception attempt.

Variations in the Character of the Initial Attack

28. As we have stated earlier, a major warning problem for intelligence stems from the fact that the actual Soviet plan for attack would almost certainly not be known to us. This means that intelligence could not conclude categorically that the particular degree of readiness which we estimated had been reached had brought Soviet preparations to a stage of near completion. It would therefore become necessary to use the information we had, first, to point to the character of the various attacks which the USSR *could* launch, and second, to assess the *probability* that a particular attack would be launched. Beyond this, many specific elements bearing on the character of an initial attack and affecting the warning problem could not be precisely estimated, for example, the weight and direction of attack which the Soviet leaders would consider necessary and at the same time compatible with surprise, what delivery systems other than aircraft would be used in initial attacks, the allocation of forces to continental US targets as opposed to targets elsewhere, and the bases from which initial attacks would be launched. In any given situation, the indications obtained by intelligence would consequently vary in frequency, number, and kind, and would have to be related to alternative hypotheses as to the form and scale of the initial attack.

WARNING FROM PREPARATIONS FOR ATTACK IN 1957

29. We have estimated elsewhere, and are not concerned here, with Soviet strategy in the event of an attack on the US.[6] In this section we discuss the warning indications which intelligence may be able to obtain from preparations of various elements of Soviet forces which could be used in an initial attack.

Attacks by Long-Range Aircraft on the Continental US and Various US and Allied Targets in Eurasia and Its Periphery

30. Suppose, as a first example, that the USSR decided to launch in an initial attack its whole force, or virtually its whole force, of long-range bombers, i.e., some 1,400 bombers, less an estimated 10 percent down for maintenance.[7] We believe that the state of training and readiness in Soviet Long-Range Aviation is such that probably several months of preparations would be required prior to an attack of this scale. Accordingly, indications would be derived from increased numbers of training flights, a higher level of maintenance activity, and possibly the preparation of special weapons. Moreover, since Soviet Long-Range Aviation consists primarily of medium bombers, an attack on the continental US would almost certainly involve use of forward bases in the Chukotski, Kamchatka, Kola, and Central Arctic areas. Indications of preparations would probably be derived from activities at or associated with these bases, and from the increased frequency of long-distance flights of larger groups of aircraft to and out of these bases. During the period over which all these preparations were proceeding, especially if they were carried out with great

[6] See NIE 11-4-56, especially Paras. 131-136.

[7] See SNIE 11-6-57, "Soviet Gross Capabilities for Attack on the Continental US in Mid-1960," (15 January 1957), Para. 13, for the last agreed estimate of the strength of Soviet Long-Range Aviation. A new estimate will be made in a forthcoming NIE. The view of the Director of Intelligence, USAF, is that the present strength is about 1,500.

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urgency, intelligence would almost certainly be able to warn with increasing firmness that Soviet Long-Range Aviation was approaching a stage of readiness at which the entire force could be utilized in an initial attack.

31. Suppose, as a second example, the USSR were to launch an initial air attack now, employing a force which it would be able to mount without a further period of preparation. In this case, since there would by definition be no further extended preparations of aircraft, crews, or bases prior to the attack, warning would have to be derived from indications of the final movement of aircraft immediately prior to launching of the attack, and from such other related activities as might occur. The chances of obtaining such indications would depend mainly on the number of aircraft employed concurrently in an attack, and to a lesser degree on the extent to which forward bases were used. Our ability to give warning of attack would be largely dependent upon the operation of two related factors: the character and level of air activity which the US had come to consider as normal; and, the ability of the USSR to conceal air activity above that level. The higher the level of air activity which had been considered by the US as normal during the period prior to an attack, the greater the number of aircraft which could be deployed for attack without being considered abnormal. The *present* estimated level of Soviet Long-Range Aviation activity in and out of forward bases and peripheral areas of the Soviet Bloc is low, no single flight to the forward areas having exceeded an estimated 50 aircraft. The present level could be raised somewhat without being considered abnormal, and, in addition, the USSR could probably conceal the launching of some bombers from both the forward and the interior bases.

32. As a rough estimate, we believe that at present a force up to 300 long-range aircraft could probably be launched concurrently without producing indications permitting intelligence to give warning of possible attack. Generally speaking, the probability of obtaining warning indications would increase as the numbers of aircraft increased. There is no basis for judging at what point the chances of receiving warning indications would be about even; we believe, however, that if the number of aircraft launched concurrently were as great as about 800, the chances of their producing warning indications would be considerably greater than even. If received, these indications would probably permit intelligence to warn of a possible attack some 4–8 hours before attacking aircraft could reach radar warning lines. It would always be possible, however, for the movement to and out of forward bases to be a practice maneuver rather than an attack.

33. In an attack of this scale, as of any other, activities related to Soviet air operations and security, as distinguished from the movement and weaponing of the attack bombers, might also provide indications of preparations for attack, perhaps as much as several days before an attack. Such preparations might include: the imposition of very strict controls over air traffic; quicker and more decisive air defense reactions to accidental or stray flights; strict enforcement of regulations for air traffic through gates into Soviet air space, such as the Berlin corridors; and unusual activity at or near supply bases serving Soviet Long-Range Aviation. Such indications, especially if they occurred concurrently and within a short period of time, might provide a basis for giving a preliminary warning earlier than warning which might be given based on the movement of the bombers themselves.

Attacks by Guided Missiles

34. At present, the USSR could probably employ in an initial attack some surface-to-surface guided missiles up to ranges of 700 nautical miles.[8] We have no reliable intelligence as to the numbers of these weapons which may be available or the location of launching sites. It is possible that, during a period of urgent preparation for attack, activities associated with these weapons would be detected. Such indications would be of great significance for gauging the Soviet state of

[8] See NIE 11–5–57, "Soviet Capabilities and Probable Programs in the Guided Missile Field" (12 March 1957).

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readiness for war. Once these weapons were positioned for launching, warning of their use would be unlikely.

35. Although warning from tactical detection devices is outside the scope of this estimate, such consideration is necessary in regard to guided missile submarines (SSG) because of the extreme unlikelihood of obtaining timely warning by any other means. The USSR may have a few guided missile submarines, but there is no definitive knowledge on the war-readiness status of this weapon system. Sorties of a substantial number of submarines from either the Baltic or Black Seas, other than through the Inland Waterways System to the White Sea, would almost certainly jeopardize the achievement of surprise in an attack. However, the USSR might consider that it could employ a few guided missile submarines from its Northern and Pacific Fleets without undue risk of alerting us prematurely. If indications of possible submarines were detected by our Sound Surveillance System, ASW aircraft back-up could confirm identification of such contacts as submarines. If so identified, we would be alerted and the time might be as much as five days prior to possible SSG reaching launching points. This would not permit specific warning of attack by submarine-launched guided missiles, although the possibility of such attack would have to be considered in the warning given.

Attack on Western Europe by Soviet Forces Stationed in East Germany

36. Soviet forces in East Germany are maintained in a high state of readiness, and no reinforcements would be necessary to initiate an attack. The period of preparation would probably not exceed two to seven days, assuming a desire to maximize the chances of attaining surprise. Warning of unusual and threatening activity would be obtained if major elements were actually assembled in forward positions. Time to accomplish this disposition would vary seasonally, depending on whether units were at home stations or at some field training phase of the annual training cycle. Warning based on movements of units to attack positions would probably vary as follows:

a. From a few hours to a few days in April and in September–October, although the possibility exists that there would be no warning;

b. From two to five days in May–August;

c. From five to seven days in November–March.

General Mobilization

37. If the USSR undertook to mobilize its full war potential, a great variety of indications would be obtained. They would relate to such activities as call-ups of reserves, retention of annual classes beyond the time of normal release, redeployment of units to forward areas, and intensified training programs. Economic measures would be taken affecting production programs, allocations of materials and labor supply, and utilization of transport. Many of these measures would have to be accompanied by public instructions and explanations and therefore the fact that mobilization was proceeding could not be hidden from intelligence.

38. At some point during the total mobilization of Soviet national life, both the occurrence of mobilization and the pace at which it was proceeding would almost certainly be detected by intelligence. In this case, there would probably be a period of at least six months during which intelligence could give warning of progressively greater readiness for war. However, it is uncertain that the pattern of indications would justify more specific warning at any time during this period.

39. In view of the economic costs and dislocations involved, evidence that the USSR was fully mobilizing the military establishment, which we estimate could be accomplished in about 30 days, would almost certainly have to be interpreted as indicative of Soviet expectation of hostilities, and intelligence might be able to forecast the approximate date at which these military preparations would be complete. However, it would always be possible for the USSR to attack with its ready forces at an earlier date.

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Clandestine Attack

40. The USSR could also commit acts of war against the US clandestinely. In an initial attack it could, to take the most serious case as example, employ nuclear weapons which had been introduced clandestinely into the US or into overseas bases.[9] The ability of intelligence to give warning of an initial attack launched by this means would depend primarily on the possibility that some part of the Soviet clandestine plan had miscarried in a way which would provide disclosure, that some individual privy to the arrangements had defected, or on chance discovery. Discovery that the USSR was attempting to introduce a nuclear weapon into the US or one of its bases would lead intelligence to give its firmest warning of Soviet intent to attack. Similarly, discovery of Communist plans for systematic sabotage of civil and military communications at a given time would provide very firm indications of a Communist intention to attack.

41. Clandestine activities of a lesser order of importance — e.g., strikes, minor acts of sabotage on a large scale, etc. — might contribute to our ability to give meaningful warning. We could not be certain, however, that such activities had been organized in conjunction with an attack on the US.

Defensive Preparations

42. In view of the threat posed by Western retaliatory power, the Soviet leaders would also undertake certain defensive preparations. Military measures which could be taken might include alerting of air defense forces and instructions to them to prevent confusion during launching of the Soviet bombers; air defense measures for military units and installations; reconnaissance by submarines and aircraft to locate US carrier forces. If steps such as these were not taken, the USSR's ability to withstand a retaliatory blow would be seriously handicapped. If they were taken, they might be detected as much as a week or 10 days prior to the Soviet initial attack. Civil measures which could be taken might include activation of civil defense and evacuation of key personnel and possibly elements of the population from potential target areas. The USSR might decide to forego such preparations until a short time before the initial attack in order to increase chances of achieving surprise. If, however, such measures were taken earlier on a substantial scale they would be detected. Since these would involve high economic cost and risk of causing panic in the population, they would greatly increase the definiteness with which warning would be given.

43. The risk which the USSR would be willing to accept as a result of neglecting some or all of this type of defensive preparations would depend in part on the degree of success which the Soviet leaders expected their own initial attack to achieve. We believe that in elementary prudence they would be unwilling to forego preparations to receive a retaliatory attack, especially in 1957. Therefore, some important indicators of this type would probably be obtained.

Other Considerations

44. In the foregoing paragraphs an attempt has been made to describe in a general way the evidence which might become available from various kinds of Soviet military preparations for attack, and to estimate the length of time before attack that such evidence would be available. In addition, however, the *certainty* and *urgency* of the warning which would actually be given by intelligence would depend upon the following factors:

a. The rate, or pace, at which Soviet preparations for attack appeared to be undertaken. We have frequently estimated that Soviet capabilities for attack are continually increasing as Soviet weapons and weapons delivery systems gradually improve under normal Soviet policies of military development. Such preparations do not produce warnings that an attack is likely. However, a substantial acceleration of the tempo of such preparations, especially if pointed to achievement at an early date of a degree of readiness thought

[9] See SNIE 11-6-57, Paras. 69-71.

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to be adequate for attack, would lead to warning of considerable urgency.

b. Indications in political, economic, psychological and other fields which would probably accompany evidence of increasing military readiness for attack. All these indications would have to be weighed together with the strictly military evidence, and they would exert an important influence on the certainty and urgency of the warning which was actually given.

WARNING FROM THE EVALUATION OF INDICATIONS IN COMBINATION

45. In Paragraphs 29–43, we considered the activities which the USSR might undertake in preparing to launch an attack, and the indications of these activities which we might get from Soviet preparations for various forms or elements of an attack. We have also discussed the warnings which intelligence might give based on these indications. In Paragraph 28, we pointed out the problem confronting us because of the fact that the USSR could select from among various strategic alternatives in planning its initial attack. Whatever form and scale of initial attack the Soviet leaders eventually decided upon, an actual attack would probably involve several of the various kinds of preparations discussed earlier, carried on concurrently in order to be ready for all contingencies.

46. Indications received by intelligence of preparations undertaken concurrently would permit their evaluation in combination. Indications which might be obtained of such multiple preparations would tend to be mutually reinforcing and could provide the basis for warning that was more certain and timely than that estimated above based on indications of preparations taken separately.

CHANGES IN THE WARNING PROBLEM BETWEEN THE PRESENT AND MID-1960

47. The general effect of the development of Soviet capabilities likely to take place by 1960 will be to reduce warning times. The key factors will be the degree of modernization achieved by Soviet armed forces and the state of readiness which they normally maintain. By 1960, Soviet Long-Range Aviation probably will have improved its air crew training and support facilities to a point at which virtually the entire force could be employed on short notice against the continental US and Western bases on the Bloc periphery. If only the elements kept in constant readiness were used, few if any indications of attack could be obtained from air preparations. If the maximum number of planes were to be used in the attack, there would be increased likelihood of detection of some of the preparations which an operation of this scale would require.

48. Assuming a very high level of readiness, the chances of detection would depend on the area or areas from which attacks were launched. Possibilities of detection would be greatest if aircraft were staged through forward bases, less if aircraft were launched from home bases only, and least if an attack employed only aircraft regularly present at forward bases. Assuming detection of the movement, it would still be difficult to identify it as an attack, especially if high levels of air activity had become normal as a result of intensive training operations over an extended period.

49. The USSR will probably develop new capabilities by 1960 which will permit other forms of attack than those discussed for 1957. We have estimated that the USSR could probably have ballistic missiles with a range of 1,600 nautical miles in operational status beginning in 1959, and that it could have a few intercontinental ballistic missiles in 1960.[10] The numbers of these weapons available in 1960 and limitations in their reliability and accuracy make it unlikely that the scale of attacks by aircraft would be appreciably changed by that date. There might be indications of preparations of the launching sites over an extended period, but warning of the actual launching of the missiles could almost certainly not be given.

50. By 1960, the use of missile-launching submarines is likely to be a more important ele-

[10] See NIE 11–5–57, Paras. 82 and 84.

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ment in an initial attack than at present, and some of these submarines would probably be nuclear-powered.[11] The latter would be more difficult to detect during a slow speed approach to the launching area, because the entire run could be made without coming to the surface. We are unable to give a definitive estimate of the number of submarines the USSR would consider it safe to employ without jeopardizing surprise, but we believe that it would be only a few. The possibility of detection would probably extend over a period up to two weeks, depending on the areas attacked and the inclusion of conventional-powered vessels in the attack force.

51. The warning problem with respect to the other forms of attack discussed earlier — attacks by Soviet forces stationed in Germany or full-scale attack after mobilization — will probably not change greatly between the present and 1960. Any major political development which resulted in a new pattern of deployment for Soviet forces outside the USSR would of course present different problems.

52. In Paragraph 44 above, we pointed out that the certainty and urgency of the warning which would actually be given by intelligence would depend especially on the rate, or pace, at which Soviet preparations for attack appeared to be undertaken, and that warnings in various degrees of certainty would depend upon the correlation of indications of all kinds, military and nonmilitary. This will be the case throughout the period through 1960, although the relative influence of individual indications on the warning judgment may well vary.

[11] See SNIE 11-6-57, Para. 65.

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